

Message Text

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LIMDIS

GENEVA FOR AMBASSADOR SHERER

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EFIN, CZ, US

SUBJECT: CLAIMS AGREEMENT AND US-CZECHOSLOVAK RELATIONS

1. AT A HOLIDAY RECEPTION GIVEN BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER AT CERNIN PALACE DECEMBER 10, THE CHARGE WAS CALLED OVER FOR CONVERSATIONS WITH, IN TURN, PRESIDIUM MEMBER VASIL BILAK, FOREIGN MINISTER CHNOUPEK, AND PRIME MINISTER STROUGAL. EACH EMPHASIZED CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S WISH FOR BETTER RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES, AND EACH EXPRESSED GREAT CONCERN ABOUT THE FATE OF THE CALIMS AGREEMENT.

2. SINCE THE RECEPTION FOLLOWED A MUSICAL PROGRAM, THE ATMOSPHERE WAS FESTIVE AND THERE WAS A GOOD DEAL OF BANTER. BILAK MADE A SERIES OF JOKES ABOUT HIS DIRE REPUTATION IN THE WEST AS A STRONG CONSERVATIVE AND GENERAL BAD MAN (AND IN FACT DESPITE THE LAUGHTER SEEMED TO BE SOMEWHAT DEFENSIVE AND SENSITIVE ABOUT HIS REPUTATION). CHARGE SAID IN VIEW OF BILAK'S REPUTATION HE WOULD LIKE TO ASK WHAT BILAK THOUGHT OF US-CZECHOSLOVAK RELATIONS. BILAK THEN GAVE A LONG SPEECH (JOINED IN MIND-STREAM BY CHNOUPEK, WHO LISTENED PATITNTLY) ABOUT THE NECESSITY FOR BETTER RELATIONS. HE BEGAN BY DESCRIBING AT LENGTH HIS STRONG FAMILY TIES WITH THE
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US, AND SAID THERE WAS NO REASON FOR BAD RELATIONS BETWEEN

THE TWO COUNTRIES. AS FOR THE IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES, HE SAID CZECHOSLOVAKIA HAD EVERY KIND OF FAITH AND EVERY KIND OF BELIEVER IN IT, AND THAT DID NOT HINDER THEIR GETTING ALONG WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES. HE ENDED WITH EARNEST REMARKS ABOUT THE NEED FOR NORMAL RELATIONS BETWEEN US, ACCOMPANIED BY MUCH HANDSHAKING.

3. THE FOREIGN MINISTER WAS ALL BUSINESS, AND WAS CLEARLY FOLLOWING THE PROGRESS OF THE LONG-GRAVEL AMENDMENT DAY BY DAY IF NOT HOUR BY HOUR. HE WAS FRANK AND DIRECT IN EXPRESSING HIS CONCERN ABOUT THE CLAIMS AGREEMENT, EMPHASIZING ITS IMPORTANCE FOR CZECHOSLOVAKIA. CHNOUPEK SAID HE HAD JUST REACHED SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF DIFFICULT CLAIMS TALKS WITH AUSTRIA, AND WOULD GO TO VIENNA NEXT WEEK TO SIGN AGREEMENT: WITH EXCEPTION OF UK (WHICH WAS TIED TO US CALIMS AGREEMENT OUTCOME), HE HAD THUS FINISHED THIS CRUCIAL SERIES OF SETTLEMENTS, ALL EXCEPT FOR AMERICA. IT WAS VERY IMPORTANT, HE SAID, THAT THE US-CZECHOSLOVAK CLAIMS AGREEMENT NOT FALL BY THE WAY.

4. CHNOUPEK THEN PRESENTED CHARGE TO STROUGAL, AND CHARGE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR GOOD RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN MINISTRY AND WITH CHNOUPEK, WHO HAD BEEN PATIENT DURING COMPLICATED LEGISLATIVE PROCESS WHICH HAD DELAYED SIGNING OF CLAIMS AGREEMENT. IN GOOD HUMOR, STROUGAL SAID CHNOUPEK MIGHT BE PATIENT WITH UNITED STATES BUT WAS NOT PATIENT AT ALL WITH HIS COLLEAGUES, AND HE ASKED CHARGE IF CZECHOSLOVAKS SHOULD REMAIN PATIENT UNTIL HE AND CHNOUPEK HAD GRAY BEARD LIKE CHARGE. CHARGE SAID HE WAS BY NATURE OPTIMISTIC, AND HOPED SITUATION IN CONGRESS WOULD SOON BE RESOLVED SO THAT CLAIMS AGREEMENT COULD BE SIGNED. IN EXPRESSING US DESIRE FOR GOOD RELATIONS WITH CZECHOSLOVAKIA, CHARGE ASKED STROUGAL HOW HE SAW RELATIONS DEVELOPING IN FUTURE. STROUGAL REPLIED EARNESTLY, PUTTING ALL SMILES ASIDE, THAT HE THOUGHT IT WAS WRONG FOR COOLNESS TO EXIST BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, AND HE FELT STRONGLY THAT WE SHOULD MOVE TOWARDS BETTER RELATIONS.

5. COMMENT: THIS CAREFULLY ARRANGED ONE-TWO-THREE (WHICH LASTED UPWARDS OF HALF HOUR) WAS OF COURSE TESTIMONY TO THE EXTREME IMPORTANCE THE CZECHOSLOVAKS
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ATTACH TO THE CLAIMS AGREEMENT AND THE EXTREME CONCERN THAT IT WILL GET BOGGED DOWN. IT WAS NOTEWORTHY THAT, UNLIKE LOWER-LEVEL OFFICIALS, THESE THREE DID NOT MAKE ANY THREATENING SOUNDS ABOUT DIRE RESULTS IF LONG-GRAVEL SUCCEEDED. THEIR MESSAGE CAME THROUGH IN READILY GRASPABLE FORM THAT CZECHOSLOVAKIA NEEDED AND WANTED THE CLAIMS AGREEMENT -- AND FURTHER STEPS TOWARDS NORMALIZATION WITH THE UNITED STATES -- VERY BADLY INDEED.

6. BIOGRAPHIC NOTE: STROUGAL AND CHNOUPEK LOOK YOU STRAIGHT
IN THE EYE BUT BILAK DOES NOT.
PERRY

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